PUBLIC WORSHIP

Considered and Enforced,

BY

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"NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES TOGETHER AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS."

Hebrews X. 25.

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PREFACE.

NO apology can be made for offering the following pages to the public eye, but the importance of the subject, and the motive of the Author. He confesses the superior talents of preceding writers, and does not mean at all to undervalue their works, but only to add a small attempt to forward the good cause in which they have labored. He is aware many more observations might have been made, and the subject placed in additional points of light. But he wished not to write a book *but only a pamphlet, and indeed a small pamphlet, that it might have the chance of circulating and being read, where any thing large on the subject could not make its way. The lower as well as the higher classes need exhortation and encouragement to attend to public worship. Some it is true in all stations from age, infirmity, or other reasons, may be either totally or considerably freed from the obligation that lies on those who have health and opportunity. But such cases are easily discernible; we are too apt to make the most of the excuses in our power, and more often need exhortations to activity, than the contrary. It deserves enquiry, what tendency the relaxed sentiments and practice of the present age respecting public worship have had on those who have*

fairly felt their influence; what is the most likely way of preserving the present professors of Christianity from the fatal effects of indifference and infidelity; and how we shall best keep the rising generation from that early opposition to all religion of which we have seen too many instances. We cannot expect that every endeavour will be successful, but nothing can be hoped for if nothing be attempted. From a proper regard to God's Worship some good effects will follow. And the more we combine with it, a conscientious and wise attention to the other parts of religion, the greater will be the force of our example and the prevalence of our prayers. The remarks here before our reader are left to his serious consideration; May the blessing of God follow whatever is agreeable to his will!

PUBLIC WORSHIP

CONSIDERED AND ENFORCED.

THE importance of Christians assembling themselves together for the worship of God, has been very generally acknowledged; and those who have argued against the practice have seldom made much impression, except on such as only wanted an apology to neglect it.

Very few, who pay any regard to religion, will seriously say, they do not believe it is the duty of men publicly to worship God: and those few are not the objects of the present address. I would wish to set before the professors of Christianity some considerations on this subject, not so much to convince them of its propriety, as to put them in remembrance of what may excite an earnest and steady regard to an important duty.—

The FIRST consideration I would exhibit is, *that public Worship is one of God's appointed ways of receiving the homage of his creatures.* Without going back to the very early ages of the world, and calling in the aid either of conjecture or criticism to assist us in the enquiry how Men worshipped God before the days of Noah or Abraham, it will be enough for our present purpose to observe, that as

soon as God gave to men an extensive revelation of his will, public worship immediately appeared to be of high consequence. I think there are traces that a day separated to the service of God must have been known, and public worship probably in use earlier than the giving of the Law to Israel by Moses; but at that time at least, a DAY *of Worship* was specified and guarded by awful sanctions. A *Tabernacle* for worship was ordered to be erected; *regulations* concerning it were given; three times a year all the males were ordered to appear before the Lord, though the place of their residence might be very far distant; and national festivals were connected with religious services, in which all those who were, or who in the course of time would be heads of families in Israel, were expected to be present to pay their homage to their God.

The Jewish Sabbath was separated from other days for the purposes of rest and religion. It referred to the Creation, when God *rested* the seventh day and *hallowed* it, (Exod. xx. 9, 10, 11.) and to the deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egypt, an event of great importance in their religious services. (Deut. v. 14, 15.) It was on the Sabbath days, both those which regularly came every week and some other days of special appointment, that the most solemn of their sacred rites were performed; and it was a singular Law, that on these days *no servile work* was to be done. The meanest servant in every family enjoyed a day of *rest*. And while *labor* was forbidden and an attention to *religion* commanded and encouraged, did it not as far as was consistent with any liberty of action, call upon the people to worship their God on his sabbath, and

if even they were far distant from his tabernacle, to spend the day in a manner not inconsistent with its institution?

At the time of Jesus Christ, we find the public Worship of God attended to in some cases even with a superstitious regard. Besides the temple worship which was at Jerusalem, after the captivity the worship of the ynagogue was instituted in many parts of the country, where prayers were offered to God, and his word was read to the people every sabbath day.

To this practice our Lord gave the sanction of his attendance and assistance. (Luke iv. 16.) And after he ascended, not only did the Apostles assemble with the Jews to converse with them in their Synagogues, (Acts xvii. 2.) but they collected Christians into bodies, who met on the first day of the week to worship God by prayer and praise, to read his word or exhort each other to attend to it. (Acts ii. 42. and xx. 7. 1 Cor. xvi. 2. 1 Tim. ii. 1. Heb. x. 25. Col. iii. 16. &c.)

Thus the practice of worshiping God, as a token of our dependance and gratitude, has lived through various ages: He hath changed the dispensation of Moses for that of Christ; he hath abolished the day and the rituals of his former service; he hath called now the Gentiles of different nations to know his name; he hath excluded his ancient people from their privileges, and hath made strangers partakers of his favor; but still through all these changes, the obligation to attend to his worship is evidently considered as abiding in force. And shall the professors of the religion of Jesus be indisposed to *give unto God the Glory due unto his name?* (Ps. xxix. 2.) Have not they above all men who ever lived, reasons for gratitude and praise?

Are not they peculiarly recipients of God's favor, dependants on his manifold Grace? And shall they be averse to render unto God the homage he has ever claimed, and which through all ages good men have ever given? Where is our similarity in character to those who have gone before us, if when our brethren say *come, let us go up to the House of the Lord,*—we turn aside and cry, *What a weariness is it.* (Mal. 1. 13.)

SECONDLY, *The public worship of God has a great tendency to keep up in our minds, a sense of his character and of our situation.* Every part of it suggests that God is great and that we should be lowly before him; that he is holy, but that we are full of sin and imperfection; that he is the great fountain of all good and that we are dependant on him for the blessings of Providence and the more important blessings of Grace. At all times these things are acknowledged. They are the first principles of true religion. From which of them can we withold our assent? Which of them ought we not daily to feel and acknowledge? How often has even the presence of our fellow Christians impressed us with a sense of God's greatness and condescension and of our own unworthiness in his sight? When we have recollected that our Adorations were in company with those of others, who perhaps bowed at the divine throne with a deeper humility—that our praises were joined with those of others, who perhaps felt more gratitude than we—that our petitions for mercies were the same as those of others, who might pray with more earnestness or more faith than ourselves—that God knows every character and lets not even a sigh escape his notice, and that we altogether—the largest assembly of

worshippers that could be found either in Earth or Heaven—the whole universe itself and all therein are nothing before him—how much have these thoughts tended to fill our minds with a sense of his Glory! *Who in the Heaven can be compared to the* LORD? *who among the sons of the mighty can be likened to the* LORD? GOD *is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him!* (Psalm LXXXIX. 6, 7.) *For thus saith the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of of the contrite ones.* (Isaiah LVII. 15.)

Nothing is more calculated to fix any sentiment deeply in the mind than publicly and frequently joining with others to express it. By this means what might otherwise have been neglected is often impressed as a principle of action never to be forgotten. A man feels his heart attached to the truth which he is habitually declaring. It becomes necessary that he who has been accustomed publicly to worship his maker should again go and offer to him his praises and his prayers. He has confessed so often that he is dependant on him for all things, and lives by his mercy, that the impression follows him and urges him to go on in the path of Duty. He asks (and there is reason in the enquiry)—do I not still need, as much as ever, the blessings of Grace?—has not God a right to every just acknowledgement I can make of his character?—why should I then be so averse to express what I cannot but feel? and why not express it where I have been taught

to feel it, *in the Assembly of the upright, and in the Congregation?* (Psalm CXI. 1.)

It will be objected by some, we feel so little elevation of soul in the worship of God that we scarce can think it worth our attention. But let me plainly ask, do you wish to have a sense of God's character live in your minds? Do you cultivate the means of promoting it? If not, it is no wonder that the worship of God gives you little pleasure. He who wishes to forget his God, let him keep away from it; he acts consistently. He who will only attend upon it while his passions can be excited by something that shall surprize by its novelty, and who absents himself when he becomes familiarized to what it exhibits, is not acting on the call of duty, but on a principle which he probably little suspects; he is laying more stress on having his mind pleased than rendered obedient. If the above objection be made by those who do wish habitually to keep in view the character of their God, let me ask them what they are likely to gain by absence from his worship? Is it probable he will be more upon their minds, when they are not called to reflect on him, than when they are? Surely here the observation of every Christian will be on my side. Cold and heartless as our devotion has frequently been, we should often not have thought upon God, had it not been for his worship. And how many times has it happened, that while thus employed, our hearts have been impressed in a manner we have little expected, and we have said with the disciples on another occasion, "*It is good to be here.*"

And shall we encourage our indolence by neglecting what has been the means of so much utility, and may still

be of very important consequence? Have we yet to learn the value of an habitual disposition to worship the Lord? Is there no pleasure—no profit in devotion but when the mind is stretched by representations which surprize, and the imagination is fired by the sublime? Are we in no danger of forgetting God? Have we no need of being reminded of our situation and of his greatness and goodness? Is there no reason to fear lest indifference should steal into the mind? Is no evil to be apprehended from its influence? Were these things properly to impress us, the most distant thought of trifling with our duty would be vanished far away.

THIRDLY, *The public worship of God is an important means of promoting religious knowledge.* A course of religious instruction has been joined more closely with the worship of God since the coming of Christ, than it was before; and it is a direct consequence of his plan. He said, my *Kingdom is not of this World.* (John XVIII. 36.) It is a Kingdom supported by the effects of Instruction, by men who having learned of Jesus are not regulated by worldly maxims. Now where can the instruction Christianity furnishes be more conveniently given than in connexion with the worship it enjoins? Real Christians are men distinguished by their having imbibed the doctrine and spirit of their divine master; and from the weakness of their powers and the imperfections of their characters they find there is always something to learn and something to amend. Hence the practice begun in the days of the Apostles has ever been found both wise and necessary, to join to the worship of God some attention to his holy word.

Here we might appeal to our own experience and observation. Almost all who make the concerns of their souls and the knowledge of the will of God serious objects, owe much to the instruction joined with worship. By this many of them were first led to the enquiry, *What must I do to be saved?* (Acts xvi. 30.) By this it was promoted. One ray of light succeeded another. The importance of eternity —the worth of the soul—the lost and helpless situation of man in the presense of his God—and the way of salvation by faith in a crucified Saviour, engaged the attention. They saw these things as true—they felt them as important—they sought unto God through Jesus Christ for mercy, and they found that true religion was a vast system, which had much to present to the understanding, and much to animate the heart. The Bible was then valued as containing the only pure description of God's will and of the way to eternal life, and was on this account read with earnest diligence. Whatever was calculated to explain or enforce any part of it was heard with pleasure. Hence arose a motive to frequent the Worship of God unknown before. Difference of situation may have made us more or less indebted to it, but in general we all have reason to value it; it gave us ideas, guided our reasonings, directed us to new views of the sacred scriptures, and communicated much information which otherwise we should not have obtained.

Perhaps it will be said, though this was once a reason for attending on religious worship, yet now we have obtained from it the principal information it has to bestow—its end is answered. This is not true. Religious worship is of great importance, even if it produced no additional in-

formation; but it is impossible for any man to say, he shall obtain from it no more. We find in every thing, that we forget what was once most familiar, when we have not been for a time in the habit of attention to it. It is the same in religion as in other things, forgetfulness follows inattention. And what is forgetfulness, but the road back again to ignorance? By continued attendance this would be prevented. Farther, it is impossible to listen to just descriptions of religion without increasing our knowledge. We think of it when otherwise we should not; it appears to the mind in various lights; its different parts are often in view; its serious importance forwards enquiry by an appeal to the heart; and by the whole, *the man of God* is perfected, *thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* (2 Tim. III. 17.)

Here it will be objected, that this supposes the only means of information is public instruction; but with our Bibles, and other good books to assist us, can we not make as much progress at home as in a place of worship? The subjects of religion are often treated with less ability from the pulpit than in the writings of good men which we can consult. To wave other answers to this objection for the present, let us come to plain fact. *Do* those who reason in this manner, and neglect convenient opportunities of attending public worship, *actually* employ their diligence in increasing their knowledge of God's will and word? Do they not loiter away the time appropriated to the worship of God rather than improve it? Is not the objection rather an excuse for staying at home, than a description of their employment there? I leave this appeal to their consciences, let every one answer it faithfully.

Again, another class of people often owe much to public worship, viz. Servants and those who labor for their bread so many hours in the day as to have very little time left for cultivating their minds. These all have souls which will live for ever and be either saved or lost: But they are in situations very unfavorable to the acquisition of knowledge. Women servants, and the wives of men in the lower states of life especially, are much excluded from opportunities of improvement. How many families also are there where the fear of God is not to be found? How many—where there is a great decency and respectability of conduct, and yet no serious sense of the vast importance of godliness,—nothing that would forward an enquiry into the concerns of the soul, or promote an increase of Christian Knowledge? And yet numbers in such situations may, from one motive or another, be led to public worship, either occasionally or statedly. The House of God is the only place where there is a probability of their becoming acquainted with their true condition and the way to eternal life. If they are happily impressed with a sense of the importance of seeking for salvation, perhaps they have no religious acquaintance, who knows what the state of the mind is, when it labors under a sense of guilt, and has little knowledge of God's Grace, and who could drop a word in season to the weary, and direct and encourage them in the good ways of God. Of what importance is the public worship of God to such persons? It is the only thing at all likely to touch their case, and afford them the information, encouragement, and exhortation they need. Hence the high value they often set upon it; and the importance of Ministers keeping in mind the cases of those

who more depend on them for their religious instruction than at first sight may seem probable. And here we may just add, that those Christians who need not themselves be taught the first principles of the Doctrine of Christ ought not to forget, that it is in the highest degree reasonable not only to endeavour to promote their farther improvement, but also to instruct the ignorant; and that they will not in the end be losers, by any proper means of fitting others for immortality.

Farther, the *rising Generation* frequently owe much to the instruction joined with public worship. By being accustomed to it from early life they insensibly learn something of its end and importance, something of the greatness and goodness of God, of the nature of his Gospel and of the obligations of men. Conscience is assisted by the habit, and they are not so easily led to a complete departure from every thing that is good as otherwise they might be. But besides the general impression, that religion is an affair of consequence, and that it is only the ungodly who cast it off; besides the valuable influence of habit, which often has a great ascendancy afterwards, we are not always able to estimate how much deeper many things sink into the minds of the young than we suppose. It is true at best they are but a careless set of hearers, but the constancy of a course of instruction always offers something whenever they are at all disposed to attend, and the frequent recurrence of the same or similar subjects, renders it almost certain that in time their attention will be caught by each particular part of Christianity. If ever they are the objects of address from the Pulpit, and

the address be made with propriety, they soon find themselves interested, and often their little countenances will fix with attention, or while they hang their heads as if they wished not to meet the eyes of any, they will acutely feel the force of what is said. A seed is sometimes planted in early life which may lie a long time before it grows up and openly produce fruit to the Glory of God. And representations both of the sinful state of human nature, and of the great Grace of God in his Gospel may be buried many years in the memory, and in an important moment, have a resurrection,—produce a valuable effect in assisting the awakened sinner to return to his God,—preserve from the paths of error, and cause him with thankfulness to acknowledge the blessing, of having been early led to the house of Prayer. Thus a great deal may be done where there is little external evidence of it, in addition to the happy, I hope on the whole we may add, numerous instances of the manifest good effect of the worship of God on those who are raised up in pious families as a seed to serve God, and whose praises are sweetened by the sentiment expressed of old, *he is our* FATHER'S *God and we will exalt him.* (Exod. xv. 2.)

Are we well wishers to the spread of religious knowledge? Are the words of *Jesus* the words of *Truth*? Hath he said, *No man cometh to the father but by me:—This is Life eternal to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent?* (John xiv. 6. & xvii. 3.) Is there *no other name given under Heaven among men whereby we can be saved?* (Acts iv. 12.) Of what importance is it, that so public a means as the worship of God is, of spreading the knowledge of Christianity, and of ex-

hibiting a part of its practice, should receive all the sanction that we can give it! We ought on our own accounts to be diligent in performing every Christian duty. And, ourselves apart, have we no concern for the welfare of others? Are there none who might be led by our example, or guided by our direction, to the worship of God, who otherwise might not attend to it? We stand together in society like the ears of corn in a field; when only a few are strongly moved, the motion is communicated to many more. It is not easy to say, how far the influence even of an individual may extend. Besides, are there none more nearly allied to us, to whom duty, interest, and hope should direct our attention? Can we help wishing that they may be seriously impressed with the weight of religious truth, and forward the cause of Christianity in the world? Be it then our concern to support and promote the public worship of God, and to use all prudent means of inducing others to attend it also, in *hope* that they may be led to *hear and fear* and *know the Lord.*

FOURTHLY, *Public worship is much connected with a Christian's moral improvement, and comfort even to the end of life.* When the Apostle Paul spake of the ends of prophesying, 1 Cor. XIV. 3. (by which he appears to intend the public instruction of the Church by inspired men) he says, he that prophesyeth speaketh unto men, to *edification and exhortation and comfort.* Here though inspiration has ceased, the general ends of public worship are clearly exhibited. Good men who have long been tutored under the sound of the Gospel often find, that it still suggests what they had not before observed; thus they are more

established in the truth of the Gospel, the importance of its grace, or the reality of some of its particular doctrines than they would have been. With this a steady faith and a steady action are intimately connected On every renewed view of the reality and excellence of the religion of Jesus, the Christian feels the motives of attention renewed also. Like a traveller who meets with a fresh assurance that his journey shall be highly prosperous, he mends his pace, and disregards the temptations to trifle or turn out of the way. This confirmation of mind in the belief of the truth, is called in scripture being *edified* or *built up in our holy faith.* (Jude 20.) Again, *exhortation* which is joined with worship, has often an unexpected effect. A reproof is conveyed which was neither intended nor thought of The force of truth penetrates a good man's conscience; he sees some features of his own character, he marks the difference between them and those of Jesus his Lord; he is ashamed, he breathes out his prayer to God, and says by his grace I will amend! Could he be better employed? When the duties of religion are pressed on the conscience, how frequently do Christians see the obligations they are under to observe them, and the deficiencies of their past obedience, in a new or in a stronger light than before. Even an attentive mind feels the importance of being put in remembrance of what has been already learned. Many duties we should not have thought of had we not been roused by exhortation. Many of our resolutions to walk in God's ways have by the same means been most sensibly strengthened. When earnestly exhorted to attend to any plain precept, we are placed immediately in a new situation. We can-

not say we know not our duty: we cannot plead ignorant of the motives of attending to it. We seem called on as in the presence of God and his people, to obey his will. We feel as if the eyes of all were upon us, and the appeal was made, whether we would regard the word of God or not. Have these things no effect on our character? Is there ever a period when that effect is not wanted? No, while forgetfulness, imperfection, and indolence continue to mark human nature, a serious Christian never can say he needs not the language of exhortation.

Farther, *comfort* is another of the ends answered by divine worship. All the way through life we are exposed to difficulties and afflictions of one kind or another. The Christian takes his share of the common evils of life, from which he can plead no exemption. He has also difficulties of his own. A man who under a strong impression of the reality of another world and of the truth of the Gospel, wishes to live to God, has an object in sight, which other men have not, and he has his fears as well as his hopes respecting it. He knows that to *deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus Christ* is not so easy as some may imagine. He also views the hand of God in the afflictions of life; he sees how nearly he touches on an eternal world, and the question often engages him, how shall I appear before God? He considers not afflictions as evils to be born as well as we can and shaken off as soon as we are able; he looks farther. If his affliction arises from his family or friends, his concern is in part, because he views them as formed for eternity, and he is not only grieved for any thing amiss in them here, but also, from the connexion of both worlds, he sees

the events of this life often extend their effect into that to come. If no such causes of uneasiness exist, if his afflictions arise only from disease or misfortune, still he feels a difficulty in so submitting to the hand of God, as he knows he ought. He is led to take a serious view of his life and character as in the presence of God, and feels deeply humbled on account of its various imperfections: or he may be led to say with a mind full of anxiety, *show me wherefore thou contendest with me.* (Job x. 2.) Perhaps too he meets with some opposition, or contempt on account of his profession of religion, so that he has not peaceable possession of the only source of his hope. Here we see the reasons why the word of God should be displayed as suggesting consolation to the afflicted Christian in all his circumstances of sorrow. It is the glory of Christianity, that it has so much to offer *to comfort those that mourn,* to encourage the tempted and the feeble minded, and to sooth the Christian in his most complicated distress, by bidding him *cast all his care on God,* under the assurance that *he careth* for him. (1 Pet. v. 7) When Christians meet for worship there are usually some in these situations. It would be very unkind were the comforts of religion never to be administered. We all in our turns need them, and know what a happy effect they often produce. *A word spoken in due season, how good it is?* (Prov. xv. 23.) In all pressures of mind, we feel much support from the opinion of others. It forms a great sanction to our own. And when in the worship of God, those consolations which are drawn from God's word, and are agreeable to the experience of Christians are set before us, our minds take courage. We

still feel ourselves in the society of good men, for we see they have been in similar difficulties before us. We see what is still of greater importance, that our God, great as he is, *knoweth our frame and remembereth we are dust,* (Ps. CIII. 14.) and has provided encouragement and assistance adapted to our weakness. For these things the worship of God is of continual importance; the experience of which often leads the Christian to say, *One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in his Temple.* (Ps. XXVII. 4.)

FIFTHLY, *Public worship is a central point where the professors of the religion of Christ visibly unite as his subjects, for the purposes of obeying the various parts of his will.*

In the world the righteous often are connected with the wicked, but in the worship of God they meet in the character by which they are distinguished from the rest of mankind. It is in the Church of Christ, that Christians as a body obey their Lord. They cannot keep up an attention to his ordinance of breaking bread in remembrance of him but in society. They cannot love each other as brethren, supply each others wants, watch over *and provoke* each *other to love and good works,* without society. Their faith in the mediation and authority of one common Lord unites them together that they may reverence and obey him. This union leads them to a farther acquaintance with each other; and to an attention to those who shew a wish to walk with them in the ways of God. It forms them into a body which renders the

example of every individual of some consequence; gives to each a character to maintain, and places him in a situation in which he both receives the assistance of the friendship, advice, and encouragement of others, and in his turn communicates the same advantages. The Church of Christ is the only visible kingdom he maintains on earth, from which he daily makes his appeal to the world, and by which he carries on many of his designs of grace. But how are these ends to be answered without men unite in public worship and in an acknowledged subjection to Jesus Christ? And how feeble will be the effect if that union be not *serious*, *vigorous*, and *steady?* A solitary Christian may live, even as a man may live many years on a desolate island; but a Christian, steady in his worship and obedience, and upright in his conduct, lives like an active member of society; his value is daily felt; he helps forward a vast system, and assists in handing to the next generation the knowledge of eternal life! And ought he, with these views before him, to neglect his place in the house of his God, or fill it up in a careless and and indifferent manner? How does he imitate his divine master in glorifying his father on earth, while he trifles away his opportunities of improvement and utility? Life is far too short, to admit much of it to be spent in indolence. Part of our day is already gone, our remaining hours are perhaps few, we must be up and doing for *the night cometh in which no man can work.* (John ix. 4.)

These things have excited a general reflection, which, before I proceed farther, I will mention; viz. if the ends of public worship and the characters interested therein are so many, how important the office of all those who con-

duct it? To pay a proper attention to the evidences of religion, that the hearers may be led to see they *have not believed a cunningly devised fable,* (2 Pet. 1. 16) to assist them in understanding their Bibles, by proper enquiries and explanations;—and to keep in view at the same time both the doctrines and precepts of religion, is a very important matter. To trace the reasonings and representations of the inspired penmen and shew their force, and yet to be so plain that the important truths may be apprehended and felt by the weak and ignorant;—to press duty home on the conscience, and yet to deprive none of his proper share of encouragement and consolation;—to depress the presumptuous without crushing the humble;—to be the guide of the young Christian, the assistant of the well-informed;—and to support the various parts of worship in a manner that may be generally useful to those who attend, is altogether a labor which may well make us say with the Apostle—*who is sufficient for these things?* (2 Cor. 11. 16.) But as man is designed by Providence to be the means of doing good to his fellow man, and as a duty lies upon us all in our respective stations, it becomes us to join our endeavours and prayers, that we may encourage each other, and that our *labor may not be in vain in the Lord.*

And now, Brethren, *suffer the word of* Exhortation. Are the abovementioned considerations true? how plain an inference arises from them? If even there be but a degree of truth in each, and the reader supposes the whole is somewhat overstated; still it will follow that divine worship is an important duty, and that he who would wish to improve and be useful, will consider it as one means not

to be neglected. And this in reality is all that needs be granted; for he who neglects a religious duty, because there is not the strongest possible evidence concerning it, shews that he wishes to attend to as little as he can help. Who would not be ashamed of this indolence when traced to its consequences? What? the recipients of innumerable benefits,—indebted to the rich Grace of God for all we enjoy and all we expect,—and not willing to attend to the means of glorifying God, without the obligation be marked in a way we cannot possibly resist? Is this gratitude? Is this christian obedience? No. Had you been the happy man who had saved a fellow creature from ruin in his business,—prescribed for him medicine which had restored him from the gates of death,—healed an apparently incurable breach between him and his friends,—or introduced him to connections by which his happiness and interest were promoted,—and besides this united him with your own family where he has great expectations,—what would *you* think if he was remiss in attending upon you, because you had not used all the urgency and authority you might have done, in commanding him not to neglect you? And especially if attention on you was neither opposed to his duty, interest, or happiness, but only required that he should sometimes shake off an indolence of disposition? If you were not the first to complain, but from the same generosity which you had before displayed did not point to the acts of your own goodness, society would do it for you, it would become the conversation of every company, each would add his remark on the meanness of such a temper and conduct, and the whole would close in the spirit if not in the words of the Prophet, when

he said to Israel, *O my people what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.* (Micah vi. 3.)

If then you would be ashamed of being marked for negligence and ingratitude towards man, can you think lightly of the reasons which call on you to attend to the public worship of God? How many things in common life do you diligently pursue on far less evidence? Be STEADY, therefore, and shew how much you wish to promote the cause of God among men. Without this your religious example will have little weight; nor will you be the encouragement to others you might be. It has never yet appeared to be the will of God to carry on the kingdom of Christ without the union of Christians together for public worship, nor is it likely that God's plan herein should change. But if you are not steady in your attention, (without some proper reasons to the contrary,) you are not doing what you could to assist in the support and spread of religion. Public worship could not be carried on with pleasure if some did not steadily encourage it with their presence. It is this which gives it spirit, and causes it to be attended to with advantage. But you who are negligent add nothing to either. Your conduct instead of being an encouragement to others discourages them. They feel pain and surprise at seeing what appears to them so unaccountable; for a time they form as many excuses for you as they can, even after that, they feel for what they cannot excuse,—till at last weary of hoping for a change, your presence with them gives them no pleasure; your absence no pain; your example is only con-

sidered as a thing to be avoided, and you inevitably sink in the estimation of those who would have esteemed you and whom you might have benefited. Your conduct forms an excuse for the *negligent*, and this is its greatest tendency. If the cause of religion prospers, it was not your zeal that assisted it; if it sinks you did not put forth your strength to prevent it. Thus in every view the want of steadiness can do no good, may do evil, and always leaves the conscience open to remorse!

Every man has a right to examine the sentiments and practices of his fellow Christians, to unite with those who in his view come the nearest to the word of God, and in a Christian-like manner to point out any error they may have embraced. This right no man can take from him, and in the proper exercise of it no one should interfere. He ought to *render a reason* when properly asked of his faith and practice *with meekness and fear*: and may repel all censorious remark in the words of the Apostle, *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth.* But he ought to consider that while he believes his present religious profession to be agreeable to his Bible, he believes it to be the cause of truth; and the cause of truth is the cause of God. Will a man say there is little need of steadiness in his attention to the cause of his God?

Again, without steadiness no talents can make a professor of religion respectable. He has no weight as a professor of religion with those who know him. He may at times be admired, but he will not be esteemed. Whereas, very inferior talents with steadiness are not only respected, but their utility is felt and acknowledged. And

what ought to alarm those who are the least inclined to unsteadiness is, that there is no setting a bound to it. Men may by degrees sink into such a state, as to imagine that, because they are disinclined, they are under no obligation to attend to God's worship, and that a great deal of *negligence* may consist with a very proper discharge of their duty! Thus they go on till ADMONITION BECOMES USELESS!

Again, ENCOURAGE *the Worship of God in others where you can.*—Many need it as much as you, and over some you may have a degree of influence. If you frequent the worship of God with seriousness, your example will produce some effect; it will be supposed you are in earnest, and that you see something important in religion.—And in proportion to your situation, general character and abilities, the argument in its favor will be esteemed more or less conclusive.—But besides, you may have it in your power to encourage the worship of God more immediately: those who have servants should remember they have souls, and while under their direction they ought not to deprive them of the means of receiving knowledge. The law of Moses held out an example worthy of the Christian's consideration.—It made one day in the week a day of *rest* from all servile work.—Nothing that could be avoided was done. Thus an opportunity of worshipping God, and of acquiring some religious knowledge, was given to the lowest of the people. And shall Christians not encourage their servants to attend the worship of God, nor afford them opportunities of improvement in the great concerns of their eternal welfare? Where there are no

means of obtaining information allowed, or but in a very limited degree, is it wonderful there should be no knowledge? Servants may have no inclination to cultivate their minds, it is true; but masters are not less bound at least to give them the opportunity, and set them the example. If the attempt fails, they have done their duty. Many instances there have been of servants who have had reason to bless God for having guided them into the families of good men, where they were first led to a serious idea of God and his worship;—and of masters who have had the pleasure of seeing the seeds of knowledge, which they helped to scatter, maturing into a humble and ardent piety! Let these things animate others to exertion.

How particularly does the same thing hold good respecting Children! In a former part of this pamphlet some notice has been taken of the influence of public worship on the rising generation, which, therefore, needs not be here repeated; but if such be its influence, give it proper attention, that its effect may be as great as the use of means can make it. There is not a parent in the world who has any serious sense of religion, that would not rejoice in seeing his children, as they grow in years, grow in their attachment to God's worship. If negligent respecting it himself, he would still, with pleasure see them alert and diligent.—But how can he expect this if he does not encourage them and go with them? Is it wonderful they should dislike the religious service they see a parent neglect? They soon learn to know that the worship of God is not a school for children, and use the inconsistency of their friends as an apology for themselves. If brought up without religious habits and instruction, will they be the better

for it? What reason have we to think they will? Let parents then endeavour to give pious sentiments an impression, by shewing that they *love the habitation of God's house, and the place where his honour dwelleth.*—(Ps. XXVI. 8.)

Farther,—LET *your attendance be marked with due decorum.* How many instances do our congregations exhibit of persons who habitually come *late,* as if their constant fear was least they should be confined too long. Some may be in such situations (not being their own masters) that they may not know how to help it; others may accidentally be hindered from filling up their places in time; but because there is the possibility of an excuse in some cases, it does not follow that the negligent can always plead it. There is not one instance in many, where any defence of such conduct can be offered. The evil of a few examples in a congregation is great, and the indecorum too common to be much noticed: but considered in a true light it has an aspect few people will like to behold.—Most classes of Christians begin their service with some act of worship, others with reading a chapter in the Bible.—Do you who are dilatory wish to be considered as thinking lightly of the *Worship or Word* of your God? But can you repel the charge, if it ever be made, on the ground of your regularly slighting that part in which God is particularly addressed or his word read? If indolence or carelessness be the cause, has it not produced a most serious and unpleasant appearance, when it leads you to act as if you thought the first parts of worship were of no consequence? And to whatever it be owing, where it is avoida-

ble, there is no denying, that habitually slighting any part of worship must strike all who see it as a strange part of a Christian's character. What is its influence in families? Some are prevented from attending in time; others learn to imitate your conduct. Children copy the worst parts of their parents' example with the greatest exactness,—and grow up in the opinion, that to neglect attending in time is no evil; besides the appearance it has, such ought to consider the disturbance they occasion by their untimely entrance. A well tutored mind will revolt at the thought of unnecessarily interrupting others in the most solemn of all employments.* And as the same right which one has to be late may be claimed by another, what would become of the worship of God were all to act in such a manner? What is to be judged when this late appearance in the house of God is owing to an attention to the business of this world? A case which too often happens. Two things ask for your regard—the World and your God: Do you wish God should deal with you as you deal with him? Consider these things and learn to act as conscience

* It has often been remarked, that, during the time of prayer, many people seem, by their inattention and staring about, as if they were not at all engaged in it. It is hoped this charge does not belong to any of those who profess to consider religion as a serious concern.—If it does, they ought to reflect on it, and be careful to give occasion for it no more. Ministers ought to remember, that it is important they should fulfil their part with as much propriety as they are able, that the attention of the hearers may be excited to their duty.—And the people should recollect, that they should come to the house of prayer to worship God *in spirit and in truth*, and not to be merely present there, while their minds are wandering after any thing that may attract their notice.

dictates. Look through the religious societies with which you have been acquainted, and you will find, *with scarcely an exception*, that those who have been the greatest honor to the body, and added most to the edification of their brethren, attended on God's worship *steadily* and in *proper time*. There is often a striking analogy between people's manner in such things and their general religious character.

It deserves attention also, that when in a place of worship, the least we can do is not to disturb others. There are too many who make disturbing noises in various ways, which are severely felt as grievances by those around them, and they do not endeavour to break themselves of such habits. They ought, however, to recollect, that needlessly to interrupt their brethren is rudeness at least; that they lay themselves open to remarks they would by no means relish were they to know them; for who can expect that those who are disturbed should not censure? And if the matter was but considered and attended to by each, the evil would be cured. Ought the worship of God to be a noisy scene, to which people cannot attend with comfort? It may be said, why are such trifles mentioned? Because they are so often complained of as real evils. Would men take the hint, there would be no occasion to notice them; let them exercise a little common sense and reflection, and the business is done,—*why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?* (Luke xii. 57.) Permit me to add,—

In *any alteration of your situations of life, keep an eye on the opportunity you will have of attending the worship of God; and let this consideration have some weight with*

you. I will not say it will not add to your worldly interest to regard it, but it will to your happiness, if you are really concerned for the welfare of your souls. Take experience as your guide. How often has it happened, that when a person who appeared quite in earnest about religion, has been led into a situation where he could not attend on divine worship, or at least with any satisfaction, and has lost the society of those Christians with whom he associated and with whom he went to the house of God in company; that at first he felt uneasy like a stranger in a strange land: by and by, he was reconciled to live without the worship of God,—mingled on the Lord's day, in the society and pleasures of those who fear not his name;—Is it necessary to go any farther? Could any thing result from hence but a cold indifference concerning those very things he once esteemed? Who would wish to be in such a state as this, that has ever *tasted that the Lord is gracious?*

Or, suppose it does not come to this;—suppose in such a case a man retains his relish for religion, and will not unite with those whose company and manners might destroy any of its impressions; but should say of the house of God what the psalmist of old did of Jerusalem,—*if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy,* (Psalm cxxxvii. 6.) yet how painful his situation? How much does he lose in improvement and enjoyment? How does he seem to envy his brethren who are more favorably circumstanced? And could he have his choice it would be that he might have Christians for his friends, and God's worship for his consolation all the days of his life.

Here we may note, how important it is for young people who are about forming settlements for life, to consider how it will probably be with them. What a thought! to be united to a partner who shall be opponent to your best interests, who will tempt you to act contrary to the dictates of your conscience or ridicule and censure you for your perseverance? What a source of painful reflection! the person whom above all others you tenderly love, ignorant of God and of true happiness! What a prospect in educating a family! One parent planting, the other rooting up, or at least not watering religious instruction; while it receives only a partial assistance from divided example, and children are made parties in debates about it, instead of being taught by all the methods which authority and affection could use to *remember their Creator in the days of their youth!* What the Apostle Paul said may in such cases be fairly applied—*such shall have trouble in the flesh.* It is our duty to take into the account all the probable evils of our situation, and if we have not gone too far to admit of an alteration, to avoid the path of evident difficulty and sorrow.

Finally,—Recollect, *public worship is not the whole of religion.* It may be imagined by some from the stress here laid on attention to it, that it is made nearly the whole of religion. Far from it. It is a duty, an important duty, by some much neglected; and every Christian duty when it bespeaks our attention, should be pressed on the conscience with *earnestness.* But still it is only *one,* it does not make up for the want of justice, truth, benevolence, temperance, or purity. A diligent regard to the form is no substitute for the spirit of worship, nor for the trust in

God for whatever we want. To make it properly useful it requires us to be consistent characters, and that we should employ serious prayer to God, that his blessing may attend it. No man will ever arrive at that state of knowledge and experience, which the Apostle Paul calls *the measure of the stature of a perfect man in Christ*, (Eph. IV. 13.) merely by attending public worship. He must add to it, the study of his Bible, and attention to the state of his own heart. But the former is an encouragement to the latter and the last can hardly be without the first. Public worship is valuable, as a means to an end; that end is an increase in knowledge, faith, and holiness. The encouragement to cultivate it is great; for besides the motive before given, we may add, when Christians meet with proper dispositions for worship, there is not merely an assembly of men, the divine presence of their Saviour is with them. He said to his disciples, *Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* (Matt. XVIII. 20.) And when he gave them his commission to preach the gospel in all nations, and to do and teach whatever he commanded, he added, *Lo! I am with you always even to the end of the world!* (Matt. XXVIII. 20.) Can we desire more? *Wherefore, let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.*

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